

April 27, 2004

To: Council Members

From: Mayor Tod Satterthwaite

Re: Veto of An Ordinance Redistricting the Wards of the City of Urbana, Illinois
Ordinance No. 2004-04-043

I am vetoing “An Ordinance Redistricting the Wards of the City of Urbana, Illinois” for several reasons. First, the new map draws virtually all the active residential subdivisions into Ward 6, which will result in a population imbalance between the Wards in the near future. Second, the new map concentrates areas that have traditionally had a high voter turnout, in municipal elections into Ward 6, and in doing so, creates a sprawling, tortured boundary for Ward 6.

In crafting a map to reflect the constitutional standards of fairness and equality, several criteria should be used in drawing a new Ward map for the City of Urbana. In my mind the most important of these criteria is that all Wards have a similar population and that projected population growth be spread between Wards. By including the most active residential subdivisions, including Savannah Green, Stone Creek, Fairway Estates, Eagle Ridge, Southridge V, Beringer Commons and Sunny Estates, in Urbana into Ward 6, the new map will create a problem similar to the one that exists today in which Ward 6 has a much higher population than the other Wards. With 6758 residents in the existing Ward 6, it has a population 25% higher than Ward 7, the next most populous Ward with 5403 residents and 58% higher than Ward 4, which has a population of only 4283.

Although I understand that we must use the 2000 census figures to provide a framework for drawing a new map, it is irresponsible to ignore that residential construction statistics show that in 2002 and 2003, 301 (91%) of the 332 single-family homes built in Urbana are in Ward 6 as it is drawn in the new map. In addition Ward 6 includes 62 (27%) of the 226 multi-family units built in Urbana in those years. The total of all residential construction in Ward 6 is 363 units of the 558 built in the City, that's 65%. At an average of 2.25 residents per household, this new construction represents 817 new residents in Ward 6 and 439 in the other six Wards combined. If this growth were to be spread evenly throughout the other six Wards, the result would be 73 residents per Ward, less than one-tenth of that in Ward 6. Numbers like this show how quickly this new map will be out of compliance with generally accepted population guidelines.

Another important criterion in drawing a new Ward map should be that the Ward boundaries be aligned with established geographic boundaries, such as collector and arterial streets, wherever it is practical. Supporters of the new Ward map have drawn the boundary of Ward 6 in such a way as to include as many high-turnout, and they believe, high-Republican areas of the City as possible. The result is to have Ward 6 stretch from Beringer Commons on the north to Deerfield Trails and the Wheatfield Park neighborhood on the south in such a sprawling manner that it would make any gerrymandering politician proud. In an effort to shift population out of the proposed Ward 6 without harming their political goals, supporters of the new map carefully carved out of Ward 6 are the Scottswood apartments near Washington and Leirman and the Sunnycrest apartments near Thomas Paine School knowing that turnout in municipal elections from these areas is low. Included in Ward 6 are areas that supporters of the new map believe to be high-turnout and high-Republican neighborhoods in municipal elections. These include not only precincts 19 and 20 (minus Scottswood) which are in the core of Ward 6, but also Beringer Commons and the western part of precinct 23 (bounded by Philo, Windsor, Anderson and McHenry) which contribute to the tortured nature of the Ward 6 boundary in the new map.

By concentrating as many high voter turnout areas in Ward 6 as they can, the supporters of the new map are trying to dilute the voice of the residents in Ward 6 in a way that violates the spirit of the 'one man, one vote' principle even if it satisfies legal requirements. I am aware that the map-making process is a political one; however, we Democrats are in a strong enough position in Urbana that we don't need to resort to trickery in the map-making process to retain a majority on the Urbana City Council. We already enjoy a 6-1 margin over Republicans. We should be willing to go into the next City election running on the strength of our record, our ideas and our candidates, not on the strength of our map-making abilities.

Lastly, I believe that consideration should be given to incumbent Council members who desire to run for re-election in 2005. For this reason I do not support a map that will draw two incumbent Council members into the same Ward without their agreement to do so. The map passed by the Council will put Council members Laura Huth and Milton Otto in the same Ward. Voters in Urbana have indicated their support for both of these Council members in the last municipal election. Ms. Huth won the election in Ward 5 with 64% of the vote; she received 475 votes. Mr. Otto won the election in Ward 7 with 58% of the vote; he received 773 votes.

In recent months, Mr. Otto has been looking for a home in Urbana for himself and his fiancée. He expects to be married this fall. With his current Ward being split in two, he finds that he currently represents significant portions of two Wards in the proposed map, Wards 4 and 7. The home Mr. Otto has found is across the street from Ward 4, just inside Ward 5, the Ward Ms. Huth represents. Mr. Otto's request to be drawn into Ward 4 is not an unreasonable one; he merely wants to represent people who voted him into office in the previous election while living in a home that he and his future wife found to be the best in the market for their needs.

It is my hope that the Council will uphold my veto and begin the process of adopting a map that will be fair politically, geographically and respect the reasonable requests of incumbent Council members who may wish to continue serving Urbana citizens on the Urbana City Council.

Thank you for your consideration.

Tod Satterthwaite